

Quarterly

Idaho Farm Bureau
Fall Issue • Volume 24 Issue 4



Polls Show Nation's Most Trusted Industry Is...



The Farm Bureau family: Who we are and what we do

When someone says “Farm Bureau,” what comes to mind first for you? Do you think back to your first Farm Bureau meeting, remember an event your county Farm Bureau put on, or maybe you’re reminded of all the friends you have made in this organization?

It can be hard to put into just a few words all that Farm Bureau means to our family, our farms and our communities, but sharing our story

and inviting others to experience all that Farm Bureau has to offer is critical to the success of our great organization.

What exactly is Farm Bureau? Have you ever gotten that question? At its heart, Farm Bureau is the trusted Voice of Agriculture and the leading grassroots membership organization advocating for all farmers, ranchers and rural communities.

See **DUVALL**, page 6

The President’s Desk

By Bryan Searle
President Idaho Farm Bureau Federation



Poll shows Americans trust farmers

The results of an annual Gallup poll contained some fascinating data that is welcome and encouraging news for farmers and ranchers.

The national poll, conducted in August and released in September, shows that the American public trusts farming and ranching more than they do any other industry or business sector.

[See story on page 4.]

In fact, the public’s opinion of farmers increased 5 percentage points from last year’s poll, while trust in the grocery and restaurant indus-

tries declined significantly.

That shows me that people are in part blaming the restaurant and grocery industries for rising food prices, but they are not blaming farmers and ranchers.

The restaurant and grocery industries are important partners with agriculture, and I don’t want to throw them under the bus. Out-of-control inflationary pressure, of course, is some of the blame for rising prices.

See **SEARLE**, page 7

Inside Farm Bureau

By Zak Miller
CEO Idaho Farm Bureau Federation



Washington, D.C., and Idaho water management – No, thank you

In September, Governor Little and Lt. Governor Bedke sent a letter to the White House asking important questions of President Biden and Vice President Harris. Idaho Representatives Simpson and Fulcher wrote similar letters asking the same questions.

What were the letters about and why should the rest of us care?

One simple word – water. Specifically, Idaho’s

groundwater.

President Biden has a Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST), which has decided to initiate a process that could lead to federal oversight of groundwater resources.

Those letters by Idaho leaders state that PCAST is poking around for information on states’ groundwater resources.

See **MILLER**, page 6

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COVER: See page 4 for a story on which industry Americans feel most positive about, according to a recent Gallup poll.
Graphic by Kristy Lindauer/Joel Benson



Photo by Sean Ellis

Peppermint oil is harvested in a New Plymouth field this summer. See page 8 for a story on Idaho's peppermint oil industry.

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Farming tops Gallup opinion poll

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – With food prices on the rise, Americans’ opinions of the restaurant and grocery industries declined significantly over the past year.

At the same time, the American public’s already high opinion of the farming and agriculture industry rose even higher.

That’s according to an annual Gallup poll, which asks Americans’ whether their overall view of 25 industries or business sectors is very positive, somewhat positive, neutral, somewhat negative or very negative.

Farming and agriculture ranked No. 1 in this year’s poll, while Americans’ views of the restaurant industry and grocery industry fell significantly.

This year’s poll was conducted Aug. 1-20

and released Sept. 12. Gallup has conducted the poll each year since 2001.

Farming and agriculture was the most positively rated industry in this year’s poll, with a net favorability rating of 64 percent.

The restaurant industry tied for second with the computer industry at 52 percent, but people’s opinion of the industry fell 9 points from last year’s poll, the largest year-over-year drop of any of the industries.

The grocery industry had a net favorability rating of 33 percent, down 8 points from last year and the second-largest year-over-year decline of any industry.

The grocery industry’s rating in this year’s poll represents an 8 percentage point decline in positive ratings and a 17 point increase in negative ratings from last year.

The 17-point increase in negative ratings of the grocery industry is one of the largest

year-to-year increases Gallup has measured.

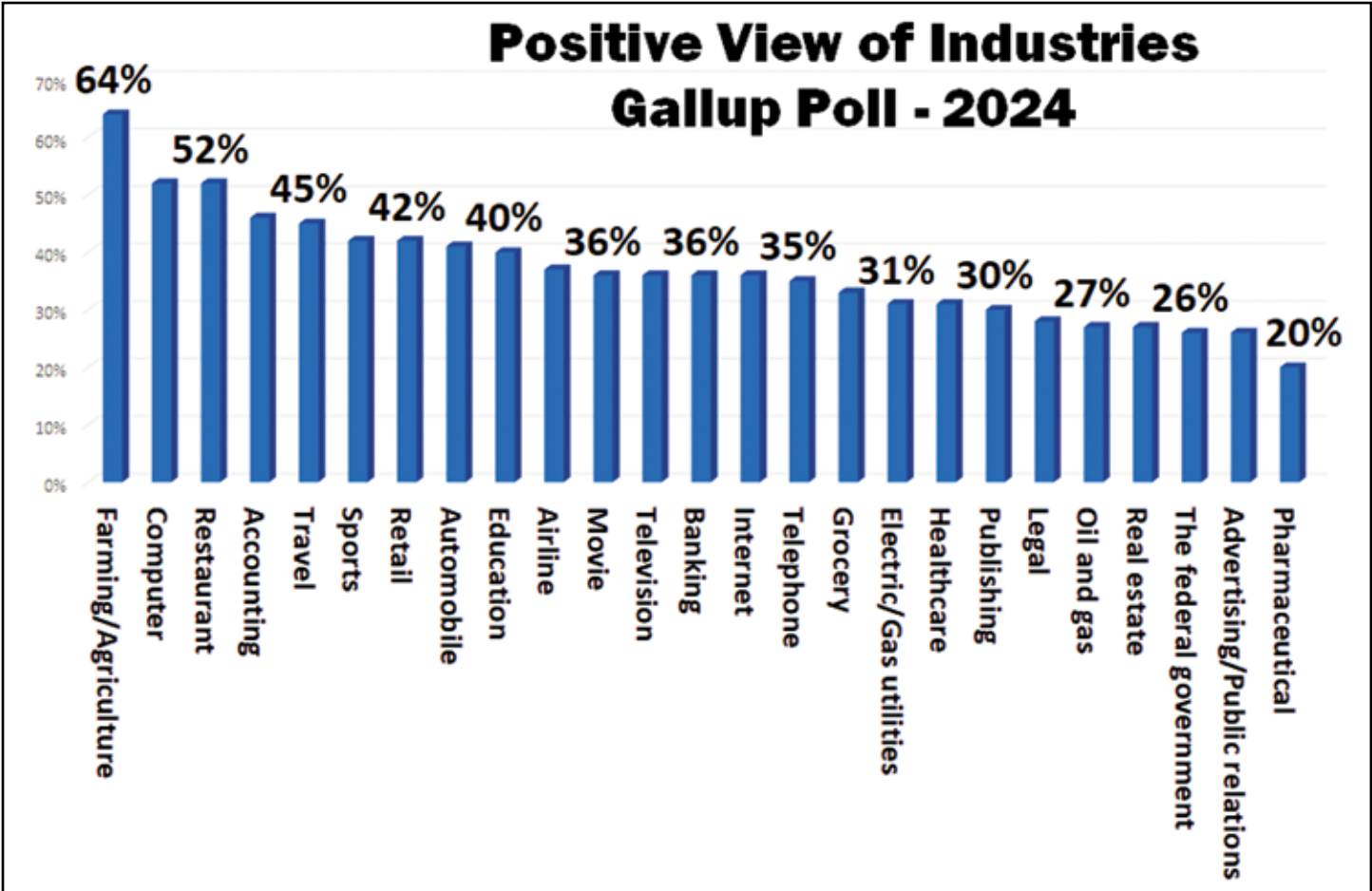
According to Gallup, “The nine-point decline in positive ratings of the restaurant industry, to 52%, has been accompanied by a four-point increase in negative ratings and a five-point increase in neutral ratings. The only other time restaurant ratings were this low was in 2008, when 51% rated the industry positively.”

Meanwhile, the farming and agriculture industry’s net favorability rating rose 5 points from last year.

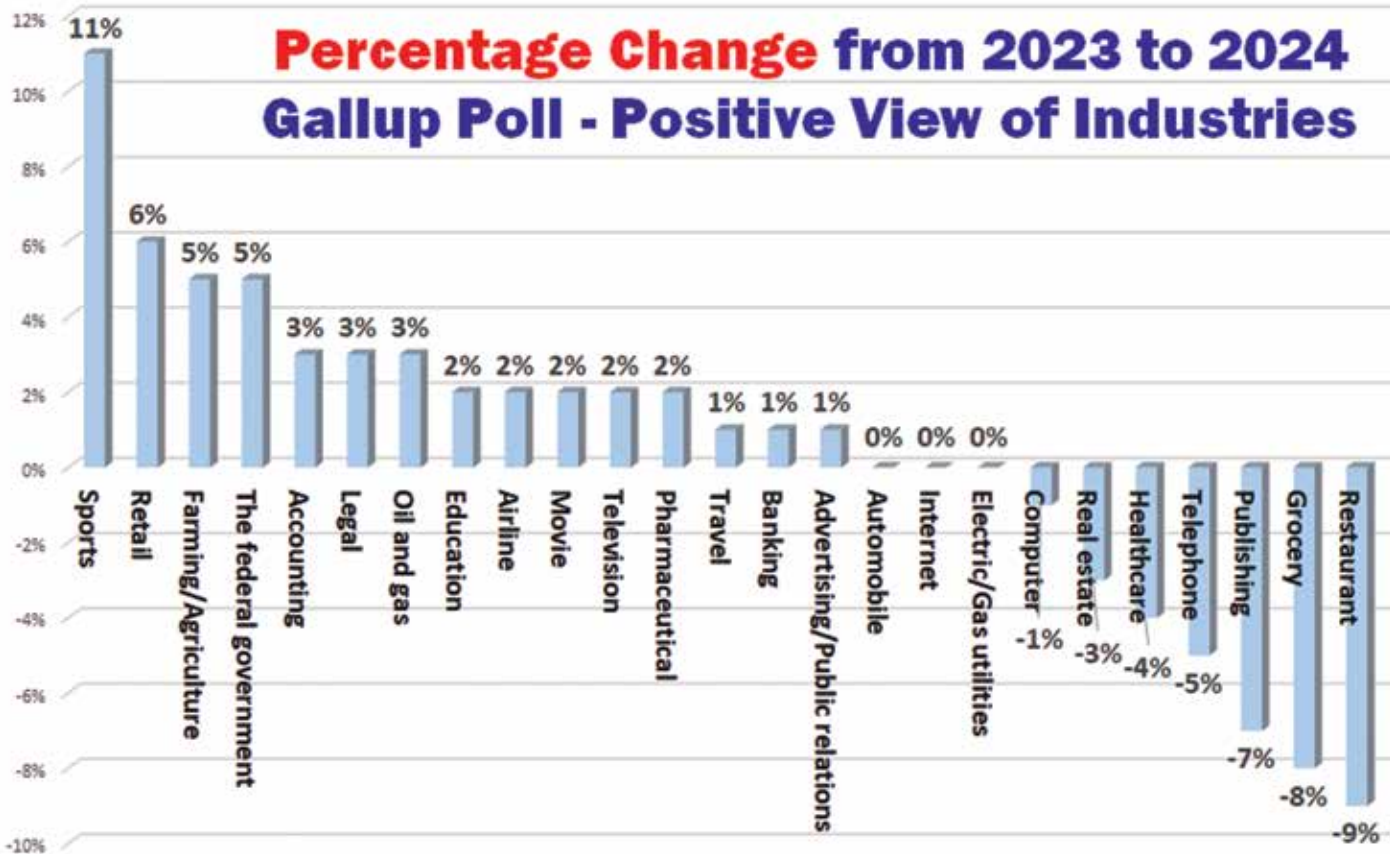
This apparently shows Americans are not blaming farmers and ranchers for the rapid rise in food prices.

The restaurant and grocery sectors, however, are probably being blamed, at least in part, for the increase in prices.

The poll results are welcome news for agricultural producers, many of whom are



Percentage Change from 2023 to 2024 Gallup Poll - Positive View of Industries



struggling financially right now and not receiving help from the federal government, says Idaho Farm Bureau Federation President Bryan Searle.

The poll shows that people apparently understand that retail-level food prices are rising, but the prices that farmers are receiving for the commodities they produce are actually declining, he said.

“Farmers across the nation are struggling mightily right now – many are going broke – and we’re not getting help,” says Searle, who farms in Shelley. “It’s a big deal and it’s good to see that people are recognizing that.”

“Farm-level commodity prices have dropped but we haven’t seen that price drop on the shelf or menu,” said Twin Falls County farmer Rick Brune. “People are putting more blame on retail outlets than they are putting on the farmer.”

Americans rated farming and agriculture as the business or industry they feel most positive about for the first time ever in 2020.

The grocery industry ranked No. 2 that year and the restaurant industry ranked No. 3.

That this happened during the height of the COVID-19 scare was probably no coincidence, Searle said.

The initial food scare that the coronavirus outbreak created – with some grocery store shelves temporarily bare due to supply chain issues and panic buying of certain items – likely played a role in Americans realizing just how critical agriculture is to the nation, he said.

When Americans realized that farmers and ranchers were plowing ahead with their usual plans to produce an abundant food supply, that food scare dissipated but people were left with a more positive feeling about agriculture as a result, Searle said.

That positive feeling toward farmers is apparently still there, as reflected in the results of this year’s poll, he added.

“People realize the importance of having a good, strong domestic food supply vs. relying too much on imports,” said Brune.

While Americans’ opinions about the restaurant and grocery industries is falling, their collective views of farmers and ranchers is very positive and holding steady, Searle says.

“As a farmer myself, it makes me feel good that our nation holds such a favorable opinion of agriculture,” he said. “As a representative of Farm Bureau, I think I can speak for farmers and ranchers in thanking the public for believing in the industry. We won’t let you down.”

Farming/agriculture (64 percent net favorability rating), the restaurant industry (52 percent), and computer sector (52 percent), were the only industries with a net positive favorability rating in this year’s poll.

At the bottom of the poll were the pharmaceutical industry (20 percent), advertising/public relations (26 percent), the federal government (26 percent), oil and gas (27 percent), real estate (27 percent), and legal (28 percent). ■

Continued from page 2

Farm Bureau welcomes and includes all types of farmers and serves all types of farms in 50 states and Puerto Rico for the benefit of families everywhere.

Our collective voice is the reason Farm Bureau can advocate effectively, enrich our communities and ensure we provide a safe and abundant food supply. And as a grassroots organization, starting at the local level, the more people we invite to join us, the stronger our voice and our organization become.

This past spring, we conducted a survey that revealed an impressive statistic – 68% of the general public trusts the Farm Bureau brand. Not only that, but three-fourths of participants also said that Farm Bureau has had a positive impact on their community.

That's an incredible achievement and reflects the hard work and dedication of our members, whether it's through our advocacy efforts, community service or simply being there for our neighbors when they need us.

However, while these numbers did show a high level of trust, the survey also revealed that there is a sizable number of folks who know the Farm Bureau name, but not much else about us, and that makes them less inclined to get involved.

That's where each of us can make a difference, by increasing the familiarity of Farm Bureau and sharing with our communities who we are and what we do for farmers and rural America.

The power of sharing our story

I often say that one of our biggest strengths is sharing our story and the same goes for showing people how Farm Bureau is the right place for them.

These days, especially with our younger generations, people want to align themselves with organizations that match their personal values and know they can have a role in making a difference.

That's where each of us can make a difference. Telling someone about Farm Bureau doesn't require a sales pitch or formal invitation, either. Many times, it's just about telling your personal story

and helping someone else see themselves in our organization.

It can be as simple as sharing about how Farm Bureau has helped you navigate through an issue, the connections you made at an event or even the leadership skills you've gained through our programs.

By sharing what Farm Bureau means to you personally, you can help someone to see how their values align with our mission.

What we do

The next step of sharing what we do is the easy part, and your local, state and American Farm Bureau have you covered.

At every level, Farm Bureau's strength is in bringing members together to speak with a united voice, support one another and give back to our communities.

I encourage you to check in with your local and state Farm Bureaus about what resources or opportunities are available to learn more about who we are, what we do, why we do it, and who we serve.

We are so appreciative of the growing collaboration with our state and local Farm Bureaus on these efforts and I am excited to see how this new approach will invite more folks into our Farm Bureau family.

Why we do it

The final piece of sharing the Farm Bureau story is why we do it. We all depend on the success of American agriculture, and Farm Bureau stands with farmers and ranchers as we work together to keep our nation's food, fiber and renewable fuel supply safe, sustainable and secure.

It's a mission that isn't just meeting today's challenges, but one that is working to support agriculture for generations to come. The decisions we make, the policies we advocate for and the members we welcome into our organization all help shape that future.

At the end of the day, Farm Bureau's strength lies in our membership. Every engagement and experience someone has with us helps build their understanding of how the Farm Bureau family is here to support them and their communities.

Let's continue inviting others to join along by sharing who we are, what we do and why we do it. ■

MILLER

Continued from page 2

The thought of the federal government, and worse yet, a politically appointed advisory council, sticking its nose in Idaho's precious water makes nails on a chalkboard actually sound better.

To be clear, neither the White House nor any federal agency has the authority or expertise to meddle in Idaho's water sovereignty.

Congress has long recognized this, limiting federal involvement in states' groundwater resources to funding and technological support. The Biden administration's apparent intent to expand federal control in that area is not just misguided – it directly threatens Idaho's sovereignty.

Perhaps instead of the president and his advisors sticking their noses where they don't belong, they should just talk to some Idaho irrigators. These men and women,

who work the land day in and day out, understand the complexities of water management in ways that no federal bureaucrat ever could.

Among those President Biden could have learned much from is the Idaho Farm Bureau. We have been at the forefront of this effort, channeling the passion and expertise of our members into advocacy for responsible and, of course, local water management.

Thankfully, the governor, lieutenant governor and congressmen raised some critical questions in their letters, highlighting the lack of transparency and consultation by PCAST.

How will the information gathered be used? Will it lead to new federal regulations? These questions deserve clear answers, and the fact that they remain unanswered only deepens suspicions about the true intent behind this federal initiative.

The notion that a one-size-fits-all federal approach could effectively manage Idaho's diverse water needs is laughable.

The idea that federal agencies, removed from the day-to-day realities of Idaho's landscapes, could improve upon generations of local stewardship is not just misguided – it's dangerous.

The White House's ignorance and arro-

gance in asserting itself into Idaho's water management reminds me of an experience I had a few years ago.

One early morning, I arrived at my family's ranch to find recently weaned calves virtually everywhere but in the corrals they belonged. I may not be a Rhodes Scholar, but I could surmise that a real problem was at hand.

Along with family members and the ranch cowboys, I went to work to round up the calves and put them back where they belonged before any more mayhem occurred.

As we shut and locked the last gate, a neighbor arrived (almost every one of us has one of these neighbors). He didn't help with any of the work, but he let us know we had cattle out, and now they were all back in.

While the neighbor may have thought

he was providing valuable information, we all just waited for him to move on with his newly found information so that we could work to solve our own problems.

In essence, this is what the White House seems intent on doing. We in Idaho may have our challenges with our water and its management, but ultimately, it's our problems and water.

As the ones who cannot survive without it, Idaho will always do better to solve our water problems without the hot air of some over-inflated think tank in Washington, D.C.

To Governor Little and Lieutenant Governor Bedke, thank you for pushing back. Representatives Simpson and Fulcher, thanks for having Idaho's back.

And to the White House, stop worrying about Idaho's water. We can fix our own fences. ■

SEARLE

Continued from page 2

However, the public is absolutely correct in not blaming farmers for rising food prices. Farmers and ranchers are, in fact, a victim of rising prices.

Other sectors of the economy can pass higher costs on to the consumer. Farmers and ranchers cannot.

Agricultural producers are price-takers, not price-makers. We take what the market offers us and cannot raise our prices to cover increased expenses.

That fact is a major reason why many agricultural producers are struggling financially in a major way right now.

USDA estimates that total U.S. net farm income will fall substantially this year compared with last year. Worse, if those estimates hold true, net farm income will have dropped nearly 25 percent in two years.

The prices that farmers are receiving for most of the commodities they produce are declining, while the cost to produce those commodities continues to rise.

Though agriculture may receive a small amount of support from the federal government, according to a recent report from American Farm Bureau Federation, "The reduced government support, combined with elevated production expenses, leaves many farmers in a precarious financial position."

Farmers across the nation are facing huge struggles right now, and there does not appear to be any relief in sight.

One thing that could help is having a new farm bill passed. For whatever reason, Congress has been unable to give the nation a new farm bill for almost a year now.

It extended the 2018 farm bill for a year last year and that extension expired at midnight on Sept. 30.

'Farmers and ranchers are facing record costs on every input and operating cost they have, not to mention reduced government support. These are not trivial challenges.'

A new farm bill is sorely needed, as the old one is going on six years old.

The safety nets contained in this now-expired farm bill – the help that ag producers can receive from USDA during tough times – do not match the current economic realities.

Eighty percent of the farm bill funds the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and only 20 percent of it is geared toward farmers and ranchers. However, it is a help for many producers to get through difficult times of low commodity prices and high input costs.

Farmers and ranchers are facing record costs on every input and operating cost they have, not to mention reduced government support.

These are not trivial challenges.

The AFBF report states that "Without targeted policy changes, such as an updated safety net in a farm bill, farmers will struggle even more in the face of declining income and rising debt."

The good news is that farmers and ranchers will again this year produce one of the world's most abundant and safe food supplies ever.

Thank you, American public, for believing in and trusting us.

We will do our best to hang in there and weather this financial storm. ■



Idaho is the No. 1 peppermint state

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

NEW PLYMOUTH – Mint is the key ingredient in toothpaste, gum, candy and a host of other common products.

And much of the mint used in the United States and around the globe starts right here in Idaho, in the dirt. Idaho is the nation's No. 1 peppermint-producing state, ahead of Oregon and Washington.

"We have an incredible mint industry here," said Roger Batt, executive director of the Idaho Mint Growers Association. "Our farmers are the best in the world at mint production..."

Idaho farmers produced 1.13 million pounds of peppermint oil in 2023, according to USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service. That placed the state ahead of No. 2 Oregon (840,000 pounds) and No. 3 Washington (638,000 pounds).

Nationwide, U.S. farmers produced 2.8 million pounds of peppermint oil in 2023, which means Idaho farmers produced 40 percent of the country's peppermint last year.

Idaho also produced 98,000 pounds of spearmint oil in 2023, ranking the state No. 4 behind Washington, Oregon and Indiana for that commodity. Nationwide, farmers produced 1.5 million pounds of spearmint oil last year.

According to Batt, about 90 percent of all peppermint oil goes into gum, candy and toothpaste. The other 10 percent is used for such things as medicinal purposes, pharmaceutical flavorings and skin care products.

Peppermint oil produced in Idaho is exported all around the world and United States.

Idaho farmers grew 12,300 acres of peppermint and 800 acres of spearmint last year, according to NASS. One acre of peppermint typically yields about 110 pounds of oil.

One drop of mint oil goes a long ways.

One 55-gallon drum of mint oil is enough to flavor about five million sticks of gum or 400,000 tubes of toothpaste.

The hot spot for mint production in Idaho is Canyon County and mint is also grown in other counties in western Idaho, including in Ada, Washington, Payette and Owyhee.

Batt said most people are surprised to find out mint is grown in Idaho, let alone that the state ranks No. 1 in peppermint.

"I would say that most people don't know that we raise mint in Idaho, and when you tell them, they're like, 'You have to be kidding me, I had no idea,'" he said.

"People are surprised when I tell them I grow mint," said

Photos by Sean Ellis

Top: **A peppermint field near New Plymouth awaits harvest this summer.**
Bottom: **Peppermint oil is harvested in a field near New Plymouth.**

“If you ask a lot of the end users...they’ll tell you that Idaho mint oil is some of the best in the world as far as quality and taste. A lot of that is attributed to our climate and our soil types.”

—Roger Batt, executive director,
Idaho Mint Growers Association

Fruitland farmer Chris Mio, who serves as chairman of the Idaho Mint Commission.

When zooming past a mint field in a vehicle, it might be mistaken for hay.

“If you look at mint closely, it has a square stem to it,” Batt said. “That’s really a good way to distinguish it from another crop.”

Another, quicker way is the odor, especially if your windows are down.

“Of course, you can tell by the aroma, the fragrance of it,” Batt added. “There’s no doubt when you either walk or drive close to a mint field that it’s mint. You can smell it.”

Peppermint is darker in the field than spearmint, which is lighter green in color.

Peppermint harvest in Idaho usually starts about July 20 and runs through August and sometimes into September.

Idaho mint farmers say the crop is a fun and different one to grow.

“I like the smell of mint. It’s a fun and interesting crop to grow,” said Mio.

“It’s a unique crop, that’s for sure,” said Caldwell farmer Joe Weitz, the president of IMGA.

“It does smell good,” said New Plymouth farmer Galen Lee, secretary-treasurer of IMGA. “I like raising it and it fits well in my rotation.”

A favorable growing climate in Idaho makes the state a great place to grow mint, according to farmers.

“We have a great climate for it,” Lee said. “We have ample water, warm summers,



New Plymouth farmer Galen Lee stands next to one of his peppermint fields. A favorable growing climate in Idaho makes the state a great place to grow mint.

and great productive ground here in southwest Idaho.”

“It’s the climate; the climate here is well suited for mint,” said Weitz.

Batt said the climate and soil types in western Idaho are very desirable for mint production.

“If you ask a lot of the end users...they’ll tell you that Idaho mint oil is some of the best in the world as far as quality and taste,” he said. “A lot of that is attributed to our climate and our soil types.”

Idaho farmers, and mint farmers everywhere, do face a challenge in growing mint with verticillium wilt, which is one of the main plant diseases facing mint growers. It is not a human health issue but can cause serious damage to mint plants.

The verticillium wilt fungus is present in the soil and it limits the number of years mint can be grown on the same ground. Mint growers will typically grow the crop for four or five years in one place and then have to find new ground for it, Batt said.

Lee’s crop rotation includes growing mint in a field for four years and then switching to other crops for that field. He doesn’t plant mint there again for about 15 years.

Verticillium wilt “is a growing issue for sure and we have to keep an eye on it,” said Lee.

“It’s a challenge,” Mio said about the plant disease. “We do the best we can with the tools we have.”

The Idaho mint industry has, through the Idaho Mint Commission, helped fund research by University of Idaho scientists on how to deal with the plant disease, he added.

“That research has been very successful because it has identified some new chemistries out there that are slightly capable of suppressing verticillium wilt,” Batt said. “I think we’re on the cutting edge of that technology as we move forward to the next 10 to 20 years of mint production here.” ■



Photo by Sean Ellis

Barley is harvested in a field near Soda Springs in this Idaho Farm Bureau Federation file photo.

Idaho is top barley state. Again

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – Idaho's barley crop declined in volume by 8 percent this year compared with last year, but the state still led the nation in total barley production, by a significant margin.

Last year, Idaho farmers produced the state's second largest barley crop ever, at 60.5 million bushels. USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service estimates Idaho's barley crop this year at 55.6 million bushels.

While the 2024 barley crop is smaller than 2023, it looks good, said Rupert farmer Mike Wilkins.

"We had a really good, strong crop," he said. "Yields and quality were good. Everything was good."

He said a tough, cold spring posed a challenge for all crops, including barley.

"But then it turned hot and things took off," he added.

"We had a really good barley crop and good yields," said Teton farmer Dwight Little.

After the challenging spring, "We had ideal weather," he added. "It was just a real pleasant growing season."

While Idaho's barley production declined in 2024, the state's percentage of the nation's total barley production actually went up, significantly.

According to NASS, Idaho farmers produced 39 percent of the nation's barley supply this year, up from 33 percent last year.

Idaho barley yields, including both irrigated and dryland acres, averaged 109 bushels per acre, down from the record 112 last year.

Montana produced 36 million bushels of barley this year, placing them as the nation's No. 2 barley state, and North Dakota came in at No. 3 with 21 million bushels.

Montana had more harvested barley acres than Idaho – 710,000

compared with 510,000 – but Montana farmers averaged 51 bushels an acre compared with Idaho's 109.

North Dakota farmers harvested 285,000 acres of barley and averaged 74 bushels per acre.

Total U.S. barley production in 2024 is estimated at 144 million bushels, down 23 percent from last year. U.S. barley acres averaged 77 bushels per acre.

Montana's barley production declined by 28 percent this year and North Dakota's production was down 49 percent.

Idaho has led the nation in barley production every year since 2016.

"We're proud to be the No. 1 barley state," Brown said.

Idaho has a much higher percentage of irrigated barley acres, which is what separates the Gem State from other major barley-growing states, Wilkins said.

Idaho's climate is ideal for growing barley, but irrigation is the big difference-maker, he said.

"The No. 1 thing is, we're irrigated," Wilkins said. "That's why we have consistent yields and quality."

"Throughout the Snake River plain, we have a good supply of water that other places don't," said Soda Springs barley farmer Scott Brown, who has served as president of the National Barley Growers Association.

That said, he added, the state does also have the climatic conditions necessary for quality, high-yielding barley.

"We definitely have the climate," he said. "It takes warm days and cool nights to grow barley and Idaho is blessed with those kinds of weather conditions."

Over the past 10 years, Idaho has averaged 54.7 million bushels of barley with an average yield of 106 bushels per acre. The state has also averaged growing 35 percent of the nation's total barley supply during that period.

Idaho's record barley production was 62 million bushels in 2016.

About 70 percent of the barley produced in Idaho is malt barley, which is a critical part of the beer-brewing process. The rest is used for human food or animal feed.

Although Idaho had another nice barley crop this year, the prices that farmers are receiving for their barley have come down off of record highs.

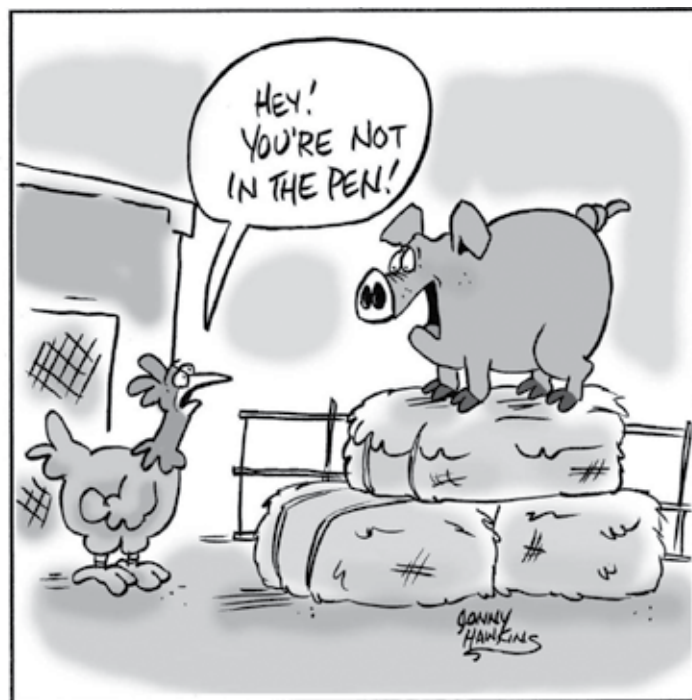
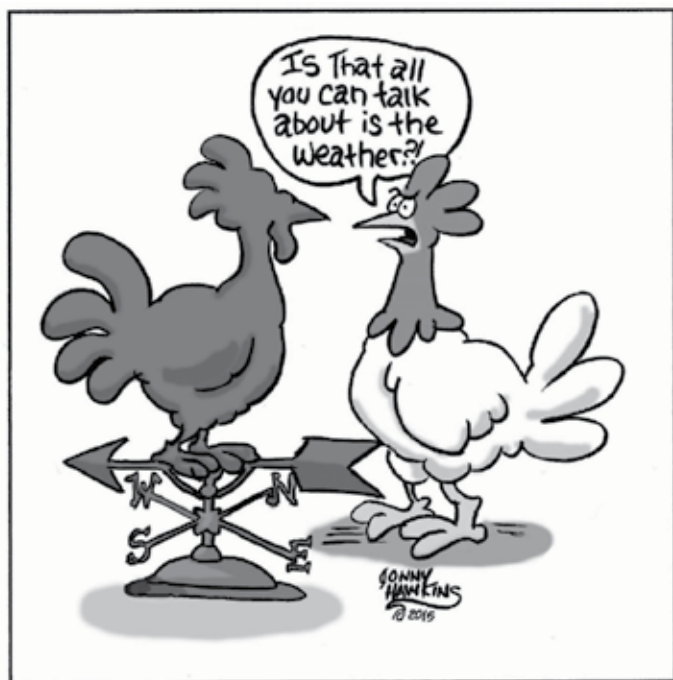
"We'd like to have better prices, but they are what they are," Wilkins said.

Some production costs, such as fuel and fertilizer, have come down a little but prices are dropping much faster, Brown said.

"Fuel and fertilizer and all your inputs haven't come down as much as the price," he said. ■

Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins



"I know - I'm out on bale!"



A REAL MVP

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**Farm Bureau
INSURANCE**



*You're automatically entered into our \$500 drawing when you refer a friend, even if they don't purchase a policy. Scan the QR code for complete rules and restrictions. Above left: Shay from Kimberly, Idaho, the winner of our 2nd quarter 2024 Refer A Friend, Get A Gift \$500 drawing, with his agent Cindy Packard.

U of I announces \$3 million nematology endowment

By John O'Connell
University of Idaho

MOSCOW, Idaho – The University of Idaho College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS) has raised more than \$3.2 million from stakeholders toward an endowment honoring the career of nematologist Saad Hafez and supporting the hiring of another world-class nematologist.

The new Saad Hafez Presidential Endowed Chair in Nematology was established thanks to generous donations from J.R. Simplot Company Foundation, Amalgamated Sugar Co., McCain Foods USA, the Idaho Potato Commission and the Nyssa-Nampa Sugarbeet Growers Association.

It will be the university's first presidential endowed chair, a category recognizing endowments of at least \$3 million.

Annual distributions from the endowment will be used at the discretion of the new faculty member for graduate student and research support. The endowment will help the university attract a global leader in the field to replace Hafez, who will retire at the end of October.

"This is a significant milestone for our university," U of I President C. Scott Green said. "Establishing our first presidential endowed chair not only affirms our commitment to academic excellence but also strengthens our ability to attract and retain



"We are strengthening our position as leaders in nematology, and the work we do through our center of excellence will have national and international applications for agriculture."

– Michael Parrella, CALS Dean

distinguished faculty members who are leaders in their fields.

"This endowment will serve as a catalyst for innovative agricultural research, enhanced learning opportunities and new partnerships that will benefit Idaho's agricultural industry and contribute to the field of nematology. It is a testament to the belief in our mission and the bright future ahead for our institution."

The ability to identify nematode species and develop economical control practices to address the issues they pose is hugely important for agriculture. While some of the microscopic worms cause considerable harm to crops, others benefit soil health, feed on parasitic insects and may be used as tools to boost management programs.

According to a U of I study, every \$1 invested in the university's nematology

program has returned \$53 to Idaho agriculture.

In addition to Hafez, CALS employs Professor Louise-Marie Dandurand, who directs the university's pale cyst nematode project; Professor Edwin Lewis, an expert in nematode biology and using nematodes for biological control; and Professor Juliet Marshall, a plant pathologist whose laboratory works with nematodes.

The researchers are the core of an evolving center of excellence in nematology at U of I.

"There are few other colleges in the U.S. that can match our focus on nematodes, which are not easily understood and represent an important research frontier as we seek to help farmers improve soil health, boost yields and become more sustainable in their operations," CALS Dean Michael

Parrella said. “We are strengthening our position as leaders in nematology, and the work we do through our center of excellence will have national and international applications for agriculture.”

The new nematology position will be based at the Idaho Center for Plant and Soil Health, which opened last fall at the Parma Research and Extension Center. The state-of-the-art facility includes a dedicated nematology lab, which was funded in part by Amalgamated Sugar and is also named in honor of Hafez.

U of I and its stakeholders in Idaho agriculture enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship, with industry support making it possible for CALS researchers to advance science tackling some of the greatest challenges facing food production.

“The J.R. Simplot Co. is proud to partner with the U of I College of Agricultural and Life Sciences and honor Saad Hafez’s achievements in the field of nematology,” said Craig Richael, director of research and development for Simplot Plant Sciences. “We value our work with Idaho’s land-grant university and an investment in this presidential endowed chair supports the company’s mission to steward our natural resources and grow delicious, more sustainable food.”

Nematodes first arose as an issue in Idaho in 1976, when plant-parasitic root-knot



Photo by Bill Schaefer

Saad Hafez stands with CALS Dean Michael Parrella at the dedication of the Idaho Center for Plant and Soil Health at the U of I Parma Research and Extension Center.

nematodes were found to be widespread in soil survey samples. Hafez led U of I in establishing its first nematology laboratory in 1981.

To date, the program has reported 32 genera and 117 species of nematodes on 31

unique host plant species from 21 Idaho counties.

In 2006, Hafez discovered pale cyst nematode in potato tare dirt samples from the Shelley region of Idaho, marking the first discovery of the destructive pest in the U.S. The discovery enabled the U.S. Department of Agriculture to establish a quarantine and eradication program, addressing the threat and protecting important trade markets for Idaho potatoes.

“Nematodes present real and significant production challenges for Idaho’s growers of potatoes and sugar beets. In addition to being a concern in the growing of these crops, they can also be a pest of concern in the export of Idaho potatoes to markets around the world,” said Lloyd Knight, deputy director of the Idaho State Department of Agriculture. “Ongoing research to assist growers in the management and eradication of harmful nematodes is essential to ensuring the success of Idaho agriculture and our ability to export our famous potatoes around the world.” ■



LEFT: A pale cyst nematode. Image by University of Idaho

Net farm income drops again in 2024 forecast

By Daniel Munch
AFBF Economist

USDA's September 2024 farm income forecast projects this to be yet another challenging year for American farmers, who are expected to lose nearly a quarter of their income in two years.

Net farm income, a key measure of profitability, is forecast at \$140 billion for 2024, marking a \$6.5 billion decline (4.4%) from 2023, following a sharp 19.5% drop from 2022 to 2023.

Inflation-adjusted figures indicate even greater financial strain, with net farm income expected to fall by \$10.2 billion (6.8%) from the previous year.

Many agricultural economists had anticipated USDA would lower its February net farm income projections in light of mounting economic pressures. Instead, the September report revised forecasts made in February up, adjusting the original estimate from \$116 billion to \$140 billion.

This upward revision, which places net farm income above the 20-year average (2004–2023), reflects a smaller decline than initially expected. The February estimate had forecast a steep 25.5% drop from 2023, but the updated projection now shows a more moderate 4.4% decrease.

USDA also revised net farm income for 2023 down from \$155.9 billion to \$146.5 billion, which made the decline in 2024 look less extreme.

This shift in estimates is largely attributed to a stronger-than-ex-

pected performance in the livestock sector and an expected slight decline in total production expenses.

Despite these improvements, however, broader economic pressures persist. Record costs for labor, interest, and taxes, along with reduced government support, continue to present significant challenges for U.S. farmers, who remain financially vulnerable as they head into another difficult year.

The unexpected upward revision would appear to offer some relief, but it may understate the economic hurdles farmers, especially crop farmers, are facing in 2024.

Cash receipts: crops hit hard

Cash receipts from crop sales are expected to suffer a significant blow in 2024, with a forecasted year-over-year decline of \$27.7 billion (10%) to \$249 billion. This projected drop is far more severe than the USDA's original February forecast, which anticipated a \$16.7 billion (6%) decrease.

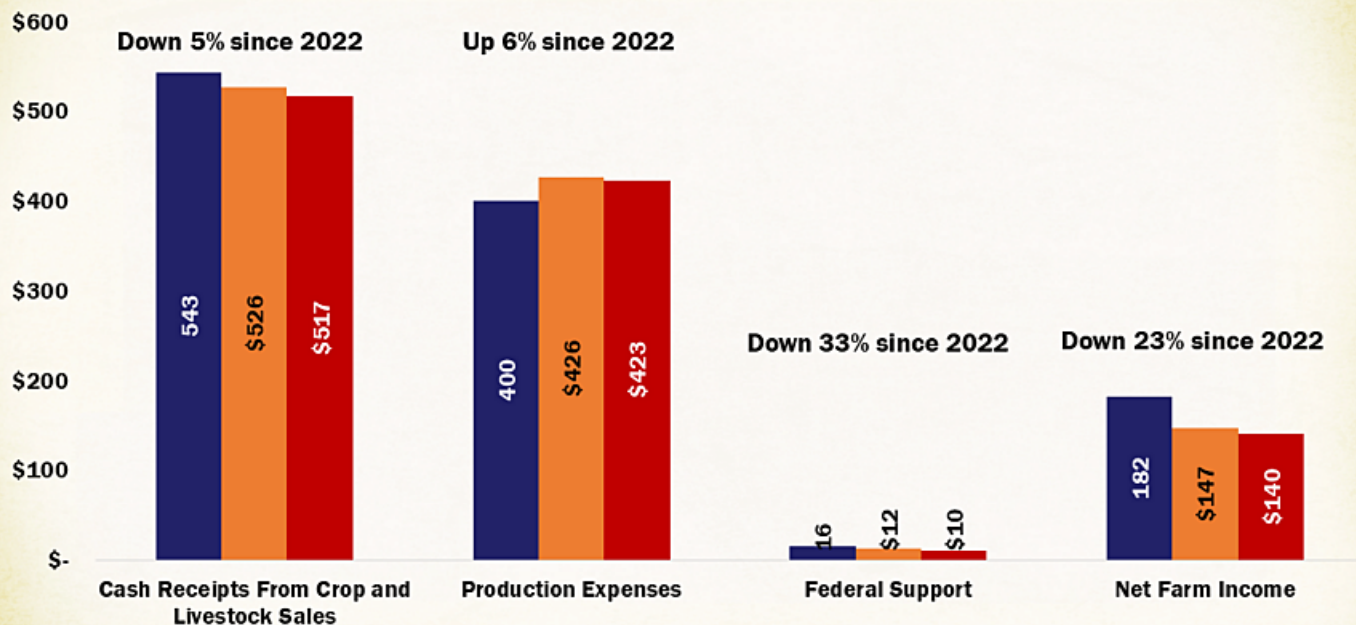
Corn receipts, in particular, are forecast to plummet by \$16 billion (20%), largely driven by price declines that will more than offset the increase in quantities sold. This represents a sharp downward revision from February's forecast, which had already projected an \$11.3 billion drop in farm sales of corn.

Soybean receipts are also expected to decline steeply, falling by \$8.6 billion (14.6%), a much larger drop than the \$6 billion (10%) drop initially forecast in February.

Other major crops like wheat, cotton, and hay will also expe-

FIGURE 1: U.S. NET FARM INCOME BY COMPONENT

U.S. Farm Sector Cash Receipts, Expenses, Government Payments and Net Farm Income | Billion Dollars



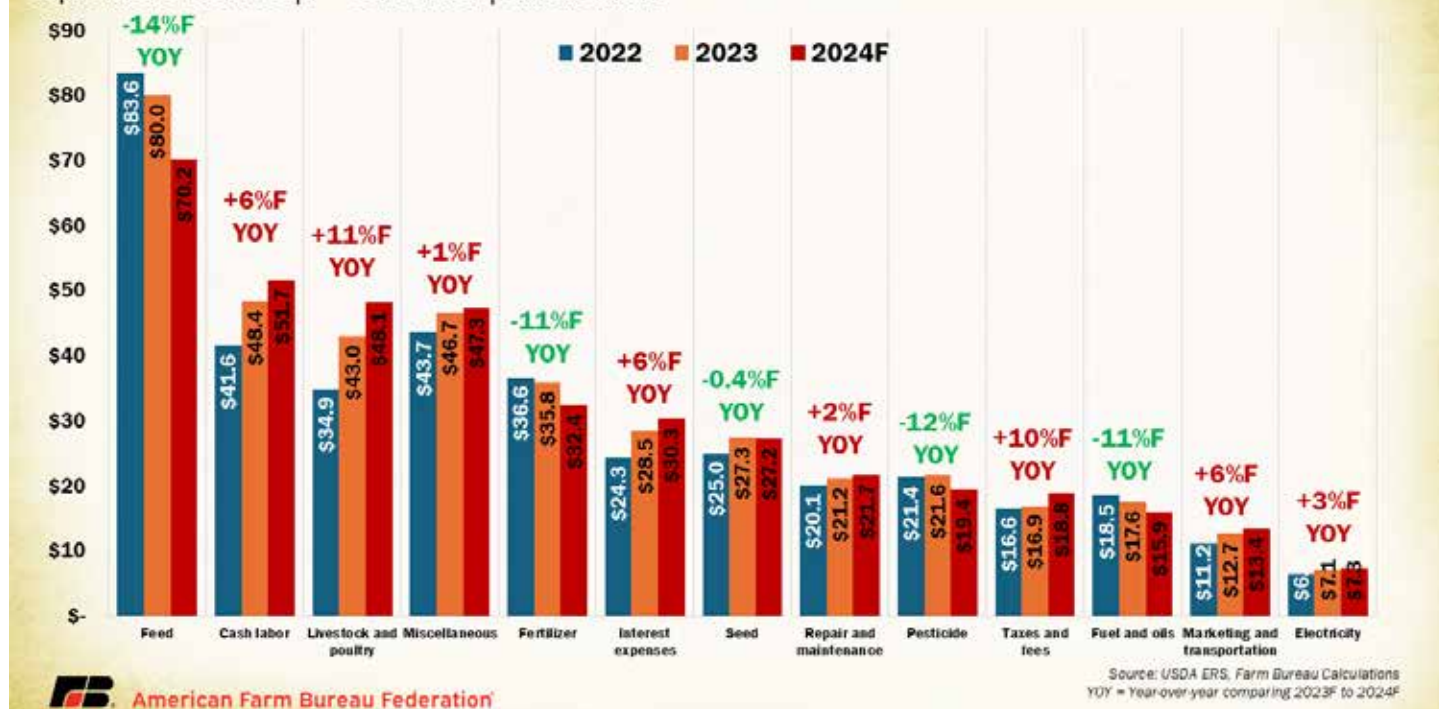
American Farm Bureau Federation

■ 2022 ■ 2023F Sep24 ■ 2024F Sep24

Source: USDA ERS, Farm Bureau Calculations

FIGURE 4: U.S. FARM INCOME | SELECT PRODUCTION EXPENSES

September 5 Release | F = forecasted | Billion dollars



rience lower receipts, with cotton expected to fall by \$1.6 billion (23.6%) and wheat by \$1.6 billion (12.3%).

This sharp downturn in crop cash receipts, despite – or because of – a bumper crop, has been alarming to farmers who have been battling fluctuating commodity prices and rising input costs.

The revised 2024 forecast suggests an exceptionally tough year ahead for these producers. The anticipated drop in receipts for grains and oilseeds is largely a result of a global surplus and weaker market prices, offering little relief for growers.

On the bright side, vegetable and melon receipts are expected to rise by \$2.5 billion (9.8%) and rice receipts to bump up \$250 million (7%), providing a small but positive spot in a sector whose overall outlook remains negative.

Livestock: mixed results

On the livestock side, the original February forecast projected a modest decline of \$4.6 billion (1.9%) in total animal product receipts. However, the updated September report presents a far more optimistic outlook, with receipts now expected to rise by \$17.8 billion (7.1%) in 2024.

This significant upward revision is largely due to stronger-than-anticipated prices across key livestock sectors, particularly for cattle, dairy, and eggs.

Egg receipts, originally forecast to drop by 12%, are now expected to surge by 38.7%, reflecting robust price gains linked to the impacts of highly pathogenic avian influenza.

USDA also reversed its earlier prediction for cattle and calves, shifting from an estimated \$1.6 billion (1.6%) decline to a substantial \$6.6 billion (6.5%) increase.

Similarly, milk receipts, which were initially projected to fall by \$900 million (2%), are now forecast to climb by \$4.3 billion

(9.4%), driven primarily by higher-than-expected prices.

Despite these gains, not all sectors of the livestock industry are benefiting. Turkey producers are expected to experience a severe downturn, with receipts forecast to drop by \$2.7 billion (41.5%). This steep decline reflects weaker consumer demand and lower prices.

Likewise, hog producers will see only modest growth, with receipts expected to rise by just \$700 million (2.7%).

While livestock producers will see some relief in 2024, it will not be uniform.

Government payments: fading safety nets

Direct government payments, which have provided a critical safety net for farmers in past years, are expected to decrease by \$1.8 billion, or 15.1%, to \$10.4 billion in 2024. This reduction is largely attributed to lower payments from the Dairy Margin Coverage program and diminished supplemental and ad hoc disaster assistance compared to 2023.

The reduction also marks the fourth consecutive year of declining support, reflecting the winding down of pandemic-era programs and the outdated nature of safety net programs like Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage.

As commodity prices remain above outdated reference price levels, these programs rarely trigger, leaving producers exposed to severe financial pressure. This mismatch between current market conditions and program triggers underscores the need for immediate reform.

Production expenses: marginal decline with rising costs in key areas

Total production expenses in 2024 are now forecast to decrease

slightly by \$4.4 billion (1%) to \$457.5 billion, compared to the February report, which initially predicted an increase of \$16.7 billion (4%) for the year.

While this revision may seem like a positive development, it follows years of record-high expenses, and inflation-adjusted costs remain elevated.

Crucially, key cost drivers such as labor and interest expenses are expected to rise, adding continued financial pressure on farmers. In fact, farmers are paying the highest costs on record in dollar terms for labor, interest, and taxes.

Labor costs, for example, are forecast to increase by \$3.4 billion (6.9%), while interest expenses are expected to rise by \$1.8 billion (6.3%), driven by high interest rates and growing debt levels.

Farm sector debt is projected to increase by 4.2%, or \$21.8 billion, reaching \$540.8 billion in 2024. This rise in debt reflects both higher borrowing needs and sustained high interest rates, further straining farmers' financial health.

These increases in critical expense areas will offset some of the relief provided by the projected declines in feed, fertilizer, and fuel expenses.

Feed costs are now forecast to drop by \$9.8 billion (12.3%), fertilizer by \$3.5 billion (9.7%), and fuel by \$1.7 billion (9.6%), a marked improvement from the February report, which anticipated smaller reductions in these categories, although the livestock producer's feed cost savings is the crop farmer's revenue loss.

Despite the overall decline in total expenses, the rise in labor and interest costs means that farmers will continue to face a tight financial situation in 2024 and beyond.

The upward pressure from these persistent costs will strain mar-

gins, leaving little room for error as producers navigate a challenging year ahead. The revised estimates provide a mixed picture, where certain cost reductions offer some relief, but the economic reality of record-high labor, interest and tax burdens remains a significant concern.

Conclusion: a tough road ahead

USDA's 2024 farm income forecast paints a grim picture for American agriculture. Net farm income is set to decline nearly 25% in two years, with substantial losses in crop receipts and continued pressure from rising costs.

While livestock producers may see modest gains, the outlook for many crop farmers is increasingly uncertain, with global supply and demand imbalances weighing heavily on prices.

The reduced government support, combined with elevated production expenses, leaves many farmers in a precarious financial position.

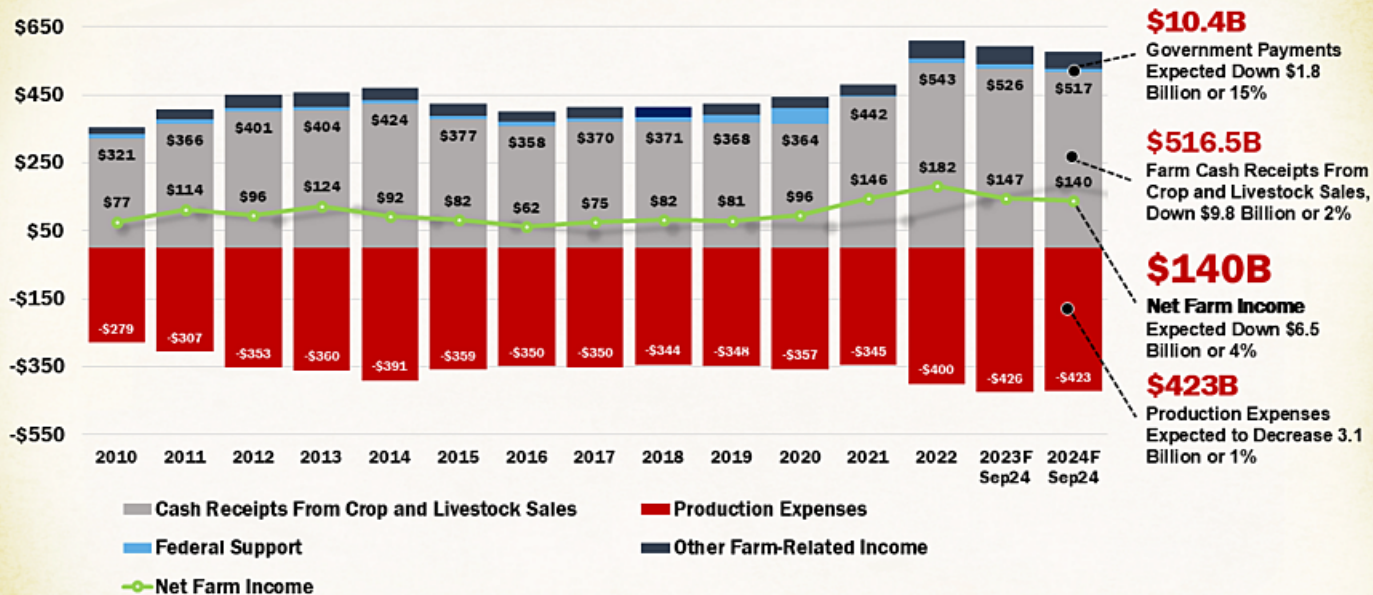
Notably, in 2022, a record year for net farm income, 57% of farm operations reported a financial loss, according to the Census of Agriculture. This disparity highlights the disconnect between national income averages and the individual financial reality many farmers face.

The fact that the majority of farms experienced losses in such a high-income year underscores the fragility of the farm economy, even when the sector as a whole appears strong.

Without targeted policy changes, such as an updated safety net in a farm bill, farmers will struggle even more in the face of declining income and rising debt. ■

FIGURE 5: U.S. FARM INCOME AND EXPENSES

U.S. Farm Sector Cash Receipts, Expenses and Net Farm Income, Billion Dollars



Idaho No. 1 in West in per capita farm revenue

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – Idaho led the West last year in total farm revenue on a per capita basis.

The per capita farm revenue number is derived by dividing a state's total farm revenue by its total population.

Based on data released Sept. 5 by USDA, Idaho's per capita farm revenue number in 2023 was \$5,617.

That means the state's 22,800-plus farms and ranches produced \$5,617 worth of agricultural revenue for every Idahoan last year.

The per capita number is simply a reflection of how important agriculture is to the average person in Idaho compared to residents of other states, said University of Idaho Agricultural Economist Brett Wilder, who compiled the data.

"Essentially, it shows, in one number, what the contribution of Idaho agriculture is to the state's economy," he said.

Wilder said the per capita number is a great way to quickly show people, including elected officials, how important agriculture is to Idaho.

The 2023 per capita number placed Idaho an unchallenged No. 1 among the 11 Western states in that category.

Again.

Montana ranked No. 2 with \$4,498 worth of per capita farm revenue and Wyoming ranked No. 3 with \$3,633.

No other state in the West had a per capita farm revenue number above \$2,000. California, the nation's top farm revenue state by far, came in at a distant \$1,526 in per capita farm income.

New Mexico ranked fourth among



Photo by Sean Ellis

Barley is harvested in a southeast Idaho field in this Idaho Farm Bureau Federation file photo. Idaho led the West last year – again – in total farm revenue on a per capita basis.

the 11 western states in per capita farm income (\$1,889), followed by Colorado (\$1,622), Oregon (\$1,575), Washington (\$1,542), and California (\$1,526).

Utah was next at \$720, Arizona came in at \$712 and Nevada was at \$309.

Idaho's per capita farm revenue number in 2021 was \$4,392.

Idaho's 2023 number was down slightly from \$5,794 in 2022. That's because Idaho agriculture had a record amount of gross revenue in 2022, but that total declined slightly in 2023 while the state's population continued to grow.

USDA data shows Idaho farmers and ranchers brought in a total of \$11.036 billion in farm-gate revenue in 2023, down 1 percent from a record \$11.283 billion in 2022.

2022 was a record year for total farm revenue, in Idaho and the U.S., so a slight dip in per capita farm income was expected in 2023 given the state's rapid population growth, Wilder said.

He said it's worth noting that Idaho's per capita farm income number has risen in

recent years despite the state's rapid population growth.

That shows agriculture is growing in Idaho and is not stagnating at all, he said.

"Idaho continues to be a state that relies heavily on agriculture (to help support) the state's economy," he said.

The per capita number is derived from gross farm revenue and not net farm revenue, which is what the farmer actually gets after expenses are subtracted from revenue.

When it came to total farm-gate revenue, California brought in \$59 billion in 2023, making that state No. 1 in the nation in that category.

In the West, Washington was second in total farm-gate revenue with \$12 billion in 2023, followed by Idaho with \$11 billion.

Colorado was fourth in the West with \$9.5 billion, and followed by Oregon (\$6.7 billion), Arizona (\$5.3 billion), Montana (\$5.1 billion), New Mexico (\$4 billion), Utah (\$2.5 billion), Wyoming (\$2.1 billion) and Nevada (\$987 million). ■

Hundreds show up for Thank a Farmer event

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

JEROME – Hundreds of community members attended a Thank a Farmer event Oct. 12 that was held to show appreciation to Jerome County's vast agricultural industry.

The free event, hosted by Jerome County Farm Bureau, was meant to provide the community an opportunity to let the county's farmers and ranchers know that they are appreciated, according to JCFB President Amy Mitchell.

"We wanted to thank our farmers and ranchers for all they do to provide food for us, and to let our community know that we care about agriculture," she said.

The Thank a Farmer event was held in conjunction with Valley Wide Country Store's Harvest Days event. Attendees were given free hamburgers, hot dogs, mixed sodas and funnel cakes.

Mountain View Equipment provided a large tractor that was displayed at the event and FFA members showed attendees how to make butter.

"Virtually everything that happens in this community is tied to agriculture," said Idaho Farm Bureau Federation field manager Zach Lanier, who works directly with farmers and ranchers in the

"Everything we do in this community involves agriculture."

– Amy Mitchell, JCFB President

Magic Valley region. "This event was a great way to show agricultural producers that the community appreciates them."

Jerome is one of Idaho's mega farm counties.

According to the 2022 Census of Agriculture, there were 448 farmers and ranchers in Jerome County during the 2022 census year. The county ranked No. 4 in Idaho in terms of farm revenue in 2022, with a total of \$944 million in farm-gate receipts.

According to USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service, there are 180,000 acres of land in farming in Jerome County.

According to the ag census, 40,000 acres of hay, 25,000 acres of corn, 22,000 acres of barley and 17,500 acres of sugar beets were grown in the county in 2022.

In addition, there were 269,000 cattle and calves in the county in 2022 and Jerome County is a major player in the state in both the beef cattle and milk industries.

The county is also home to numerous processing facilities that add value to crops and livestock.

"Everything we do in this community involves agriculture," Mitchell said. ■





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Photo by Nicole Lebsack

A free Thank a Farmer event in Jerome was held to show appreciation to the county's farmers and ranchers.

Crossword Puzzle

Foods Grown in a Garden

Answer key on page 31

Across

1. Cultivated for its pungent compound bulbs used in cookery
4. New growth of a plant
6. Orange summer squash, carving
7. Long green pods containing edible green seeds
8. Pungent usually crisp root of the mustard family usually eaten raw
9. White cylindrical bulb and flat dark-green leaves
11. A common garden vegetable whose succulent leaves are used especially in salads
13. Juicy edible usually red fruit of any of several low-growing temperate herbs
14. An orange spindle-shaped edible root
16. A smooth cylindrical usually dark green summer squash

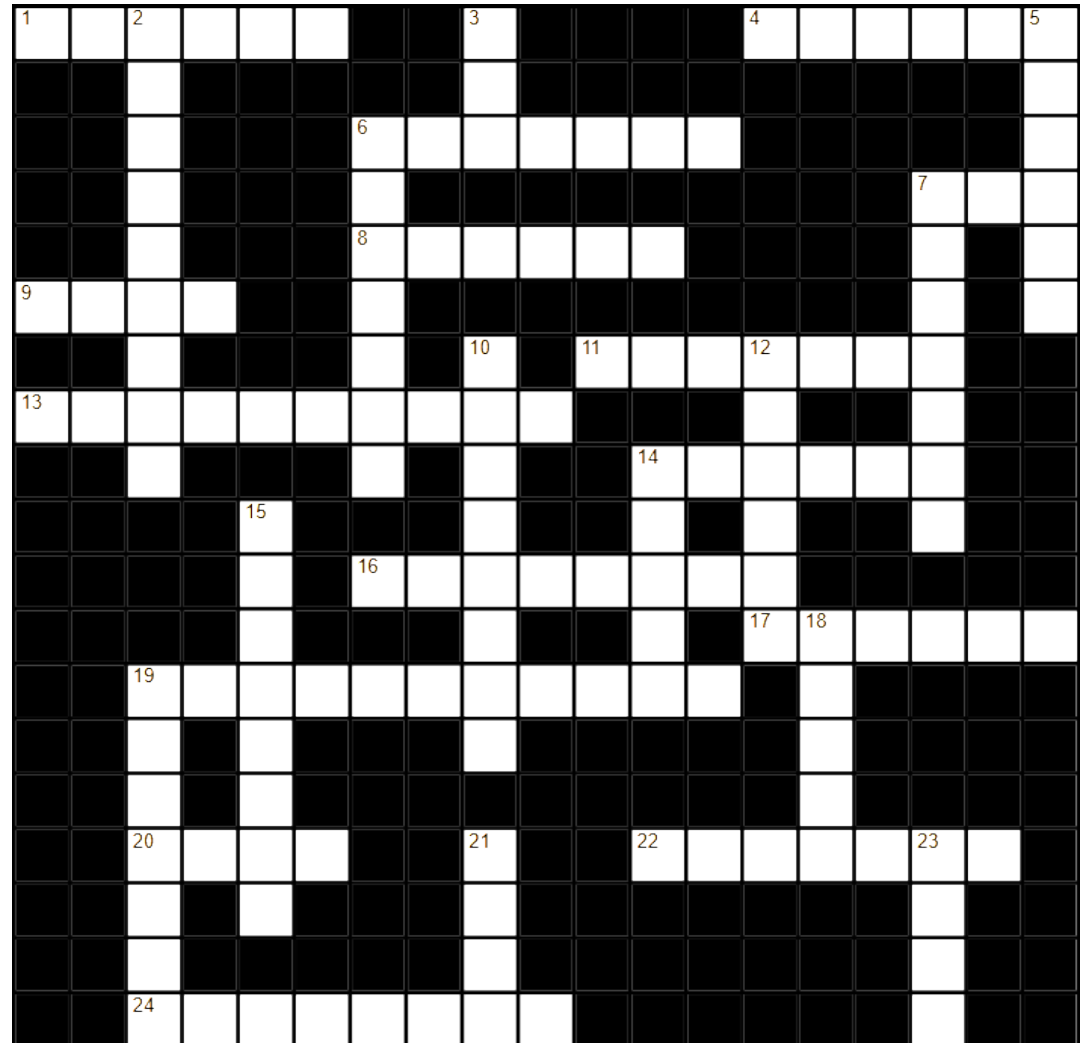
17. An edible tuber

19. Compact edible head of usually white undeveloped flowers

20. Round red root vegetable

22. An Asian herb cultivated for its edible leaves which form a dense basal rosette

24. Shiny skin typically dark purple



Down

2. Red edible berries that are rounder and smaller than blackberries

3. Sweet potato with deep orange flesh

5. Mildly acid red or yellow pulpy fruit

6. Aromatic herb with flat or curly leaves

7. The principal salad peppers

10. Plant with dense clusters of tight green flower buds

12. Large flashy edible white or yellow root

14. Perennial having hollow cylindrical leaves used for seasoning

15. Cylindrical green fruit with thin green rind and white flesh

18. Rounded edible bulb

19. Brassica oleracea grown for their edible leaves or flowers

21. Edible seeds of plants of the family leguminosae

23. Tall annual cereal grass bearing kernels

Chanel Tewalt, ISDA Director

Protecting Idaho's Waters

The Fight Against Quagga Mussels Continues

The detection of quagga mussels in the Snake River this September was devastating news to not only our agency but all involved partners and stakeholders across the region. That's because of the destruction this species could cause to Idaho's water and way of life. We also know that in agriculture, the most successful pest management strategies are not one and done. They need to be successive and strategic.

Since the 2023 detection in the Snake River, we have increased every aspect of our Invasive Species Program. We doubled quagga mussel sampling statewide, amplified an educational outreach campaign, increased capacity for statewide watercraft inspection stations, and more. These efforts were all made possible by the support of Governor Little and the Legislature. With the new available resources, our agency was more equipped to address this year's detection.

Preparing for an aquatic treatment in a complex river system is a considerable undertaking. To ensure we fully understood the scope of the infestation, staff conducted extensive surveying in the affected stretch of the river and surrounding waterbodies. Deploying a treatment of this size requires collaboration with local, state and federal partners. ISDA has relied on several state agencies, canal companies, Idaho Power, and the contracted applicator to aid in logistics and strategy in the planning and implementation of the treatment.

The 2023 treatment was the largest and most significant treatment of its kind in the country, and focused on three operational segments of the quarantine area. Sampling results have indicated that the chelated copper treatment was effective in significantly reducing the mussel population. The treatment was applied through watercraft mounted systems, ground mounted handling, and directly through hydropower infrastructure. Copper levels were consistently at the 1ppm application rate; a rate intended to eradicate mussels but is below the drinking water standard for humans.

Treatment is complicated and challenged by deep pools, waterfalls and hydropower facilities. Significant effort was focused on monitoring the treatment application in these areas that varied in depth. Throughout the treatment, ISDA also monitored for mussel presence in water entering the river from irrigation returns and spring systems.

We have committed to use every resource available to combat the threat, which includes a multi-faceted treatment plan. The first 2024 treatment took place in October and utilized the same chelated copper product, Natrix. This year's treatment plan called for holding the 1ppm application rate for a total of 200 consecutive hours of treatment. ISDA staff and partners diligently monitored 24 hours a day for the entirety of the treatment. The chelated copper has dissipated as anticipated and the river is expected to return to normal copper levels by early November.

In addition to the aggressive application of the chelated copper (Natrix), we are planning a second treatment in November to target quagga mussels in still water and deep pool sections of the river. The second treatment continues the aggressive approach to maximize efforts in the complex river system with the ultimate goal of complete eradication of this species.

Since the discovery of quagga mussel larvae in the Snake River, ISDA has been dedicated to an aggressive approach for treatment to protect Idaho's waters from these mussels. This year's response reflects Idaho's commitment to employing all available tools to eradicate the invasive quagga mussels.

Learn more about Idaho's response to quagga mussels in the Snake River at Idaho.Gov/Quagga.



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LEFT: Ryer Becker is shown with his state-of-the-art trailer containing logging simulators.

ABOVE: A row of logging simulators in the University of Idaho trailer. University of Idaho photos

Engaging and equipping the next generation of logging equipment operators: Leveraging new technologies

By Randy Brooks and Ryer Becker
University of Idaho Extension Forestry

Before we dive into our article today, I want to introduce the newest member of the University of Idaho Extension forestry team, Ryer Becker.

As the new forest operations and products manufacturing Extension specialist for the state, Ryer will be contributing to some of our future monthly Farm Bureau articles.

Ryer officially joined the Extension forestry team on Oct. 14, although he's been doing Extension and outreach programs with us since 2018. He grew up in western New York and went to Paul Smith's College where he completed a bachelor's in forest operations before he moved to Idaho in 2014 for graduate programs at the University of Idaho.

At the UI, Ryer completed a master's and doctorate of natural resources, where his work studied the integration of mobile technologies and remotely sensed data into logging operations.

Now a part of University of Idaho Extension Forestry, Ryer is looking forward to the opportunity build on his prior work in supporting work-

force development efforts for the forest products industry and leverage his expertise and passion for forest operations to serve the state's diverse stakeholders.

As part of his position, Ryer will be conducting research, outreach, and Extension in the areas of emerging technological solutions for forest operations, cost and production assessments of timber harvesting and equipment, landowner support for planning and implementing operations, and support for building workforce capacity and professional development.

Ryer brings years of experience working with stakeholders throughout the region to this new position and is looking forward to the benefits this work will bring to the state.

Ryer brings current funding through the Idaho Workforce Development Council to this position, which has allowed him, in part, to acquire a suite of cutting-edge logging equipment simulators and additional supporting resources.

These simulators serve a vital role in providing a novel and effective

tool for engaging diverse audiences with an introduction to timber harvesting and equipment operations, something they otherwise may not have access to.

Ensuring accessibility to resources and creating impactful and memorable experiences for participants is a key objective for outreach and education efforts for the project. To maximize the effectiveness of outreach efforts and meet these objectives, a custom trailer was designed and outfitted with four cutting-edge logging equipment simulators.

Heavy equipment simulators are increasingly capable and offer users an environment in which to introduce equipment operation and mechanized logging independent of safety concerns, costly repairs, or lost production that all accompany the use of real equipment when training new operators.

This resource provides a powerful “hook” to engage diverse audiences, whether youth or adults, and establish a baseline connection from which to build from.

Further, simulated equipment provides opportunities for training and professional development when used in line with built-in curriculums that support progress tracking and customized competency benchmarks.

Simulators are not meant as a replacement to live, in-the-seat training, but support introductory training opportunities and remove the financial and logistical challenges that owning and maintaining logging equipment presents.

Development efforts are currently underway for an introductory operator training housed at the University of Idaho that would leverage equipment simulation and provide a sound foundation for follow-up, live equipment exposure and operation. This is an exciting research space as these simulator technologies continue to advance and become more versatile.

Becker and the University of Idaho currently operate six simulators from equipment manufacturers including Tigercat, John Deere, and Caterpillar. This includes three desktop, mobile simulator options that provide an easily transportable version while the Caterpillar and two Tigercat simulators involve a more immersive experience for users, including multi-screen views and motion bases that simulate terrain features and obstacles during operations and provide haptic feedback.

These logging equipment simulators can currently replicate the controls and operation of four pieces of contemporary logging equipment with more equipment options expected in the next year. Current simulated equipment includes feller bunchers, forwarders, harvesters, and dangle head processors.

In addition to the simulators themselves, a 28' x 8.5' x 7' custom trailer is used for housing and transporting four of the simulators while supporting mobile training, education, and outreach activities.



Ryer Becker trains a student on a logging simulator.

Intentional design and custom specifications support participant comfort and effective outreach and training activities including an on-board generator, 40-gallon fuel cell, and climate control.

These items support off-the-grid operation in all seasons and in all locations accessible by road. From career fairs to trade shows and more, the UI Logging Equipment Simulator Trailer has exposed over 1,000 individuals to mechanized logging operations and provided a glimpse into jobs as logging equipment operators since March.

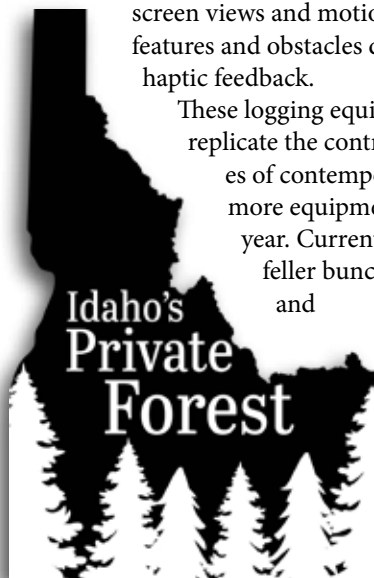
In the future, this mobile “classroom” will be used to support teaching and training efforts with forestry classes at high schools throughout Idaho while continuing to serve as a hands-on and engaging outreach tool at county fairs and other community events.

The ability to bring this trailer-based simulator technology directly to students maximizes resource accessibility and removes roadblocks that travel from rural Idaho communities might present. Efforts are underway to acquire a second simulator trailer, which would further increase the capacity of these outreach, education, and training efforts.

Simulators are a unique resource that can be easily accessed by diverse audiences and transported anywhere these resources are requested. This greatly increases the scope of outreach and Extension activities and can be easily replicated elsewhere in the country where similar resources would be beneficial.

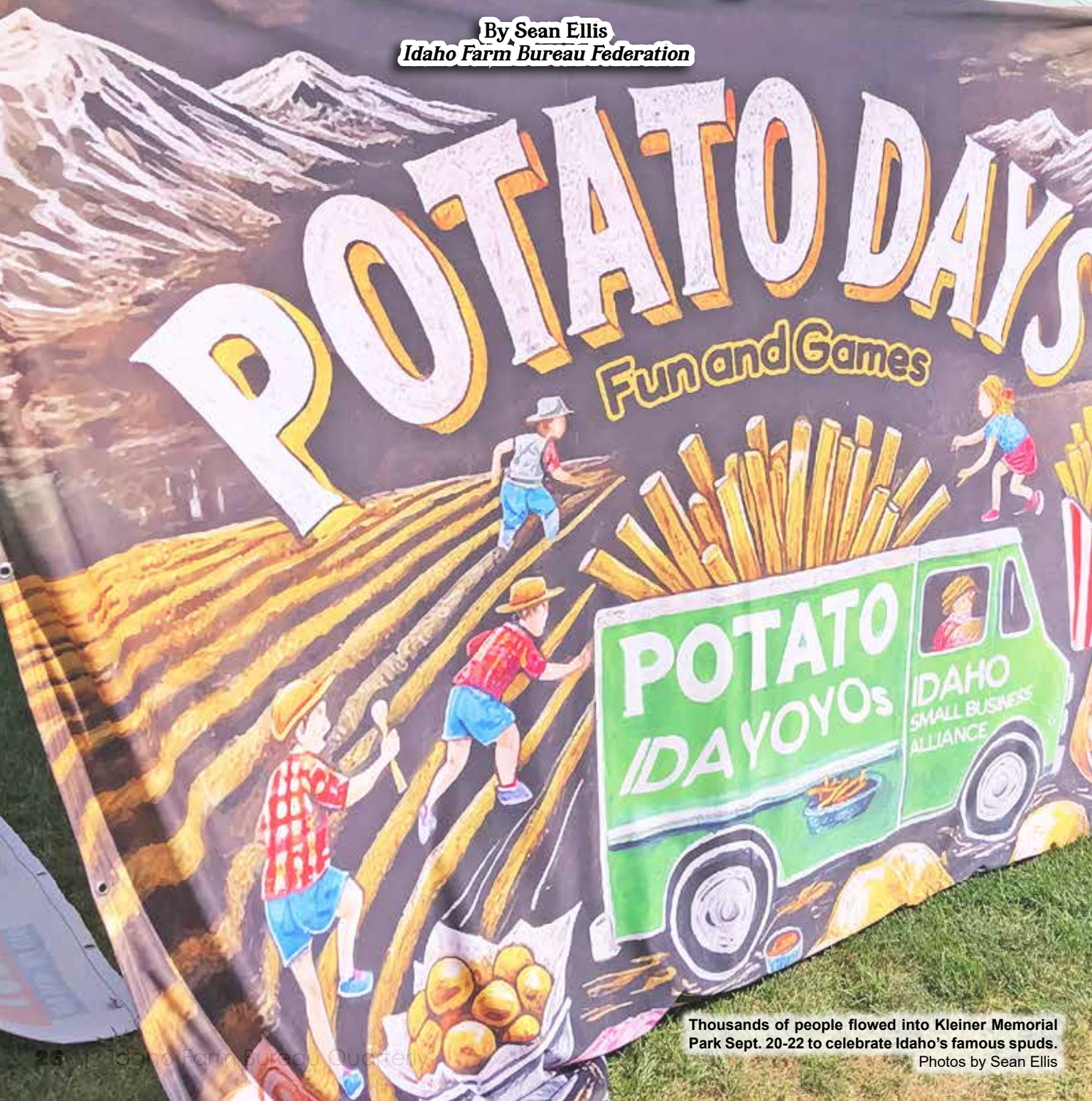
As Ryer and the University of Idaho continue to work to address the workforce challenges facing our logging and forest products industries, the logging equipment simulator trailer is just one example of leveraging availability technologies to provide an innovative and engaging resource to attract the next generation.

If you are interested in following along with the work being done by Ryer and learning more about the evolution and advancement of the logging and forest products industries in Idaho and beyond, find this information and more through Ryer's social media channels, including Instagram (@ryerbecker), and Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube (Ryer Becker). ■



Estimated 20,000 show up to celebrate Idaho potatoes

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation



Thousands of people flowed into Kleiner Memorial Park Sept. 20-22 to celebrate Idaho's famous spuds.
Photos by Sean Ellis

MERIDIAN – Thousands of people flowed into Kleiner Memorial Park Sept. 20-22 to celebrate Idaho's famous potato.

Potato Days, held across from The Village in Meridian, is meant to provide city folk a chance to participate in a spud-tacular observance of the humble spud, said event organizer Thomas Watson.

"I think Idaho deserves a huge celebration of the largest commodity in the state and it should be done in really big form," he said.

The Potato Days festival, in its second year, drew an estimated 20,000 people over a three-day span.

Shelley Spud Days in Eastern Idaho draws an estimated 10,000-15,000 people each year to the epicenter of potato production in the United States.

That event, which was held Sept. 21 this year, takes place in a rural area, and Potato Days organizers wanted to give people in Idaho's largest population center the chance to celebrate the spud also.

"For us, it's one massive potato party and it's something that needed to be in the Boise-Meridian area," said Watson, director of Idaho Business Alliance, which organizes Potato Days.

He said organizers initially set about searching for a potato festival in the area that they could join and were shocked to discover there wasn't one.

Once they realized that, Watson said, "it took us less than 30 seconds to say, we're putting on a potato festival. We immediately went into brainstorming mode. It was really something that was needed for this community."

Potato Days is three days of free family fun, all centered around the potato theme.

It included dozens of potato-themed games such as potato sack races, potato limbo, potato darts and potato trick shots. An estimated 15,000 free toys were awarded for playing the games.

The celebration included a potato sidewalk chalk art contest by dozens of local artists, a French-fry competition, live bands, carnival games, 200 vendors, a bubble garden and seven bouncy houses.

The Big Idaho Potato Truck, which hauls a gigantic potato around the nation, was parked at the event and a constant stream of people had their pictures taken in front of it.

There were dozens of food trucks and each one had to have at least one potato-themed item on its menu.

The event is free and is designed to be family friendly.

"We're celebrating the potato and we're doing it an old-fashioned, fun way that's free," Watson said.

He said the Idaho Potato Commission stepped up in a big way to support the event and provided many of the free prizes that were given away.

IPC President and CEO Jamay Higham said it was nice to see residents of the Treasure Valley celebrating the potato.

"I love to see people on this side of the state celebrating our status as the potato state," he said.



Thousands of people flooded into Kleiner Memorial Park in Meridian to celebrate the Idaho potato.

Higham said the commission wants to spend some of its promotional money right here in Idaho because it's helping to create "thousands and thousands of Idaho potato ambassadors."

The event is also sponsored by Idaho Farm Bureau Federation, Idaho's largest general farm organization.

"For me personally as a potato grower, it's very uplifting to see thousands of city folk showing pride in and celebrating the Idaho potato," said IFBF President Bryan Searle, who farms in Shelley. "I hope this event continues to grow and succeed and the thousands upon thousands of people who attended it this year is a good sign that it will."

Throngs of people were constantly flowing into the 58-acre park from every direction and Watson said it was difficult to get a hard crowd count.

"When you have a free event and people are pouring in from everywhere, it's hard to get an official count," he said.

But if organizers' 20,000 estimate is close, that means Potato Days has become Idaho's largest spud celebration in its second year.

Organizers loosely talk about hitting the 50,000 mark but Watson said the event is about a lot more than simply crowd turnout.

"Our intention is not to break records with attendance," he said. "It's more, can we build an annual tradition that's free family fun that kids and families look forward to, centered around the great commodity that we have with the potato?"

For 2025, Potato Days organizers are planning a major drone show and are also looking to set the world record for most mashed potatoes ever made in one serving.

"We're going to keep trying to push boundaries and see how much fun we can have with the potato," Watson said. ■



Photos by Sean Ellis

Potatoes are harvested in a Bingham County field in this Idaho Farm Bureau Federation photo. Idaho potato exports to Mexico are soaring.

Idaho ahead of last year's pace for ag export value

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – Idaho is well ahead of pace to set another annual record for total value of agricultural exports.

A total of \$695 million worth of agricultural products from Idaho were sold to other countries through the first half of 2024, according to U.S. Census Bureau data that became available in August.

That's a 15 percent increase over the total that was recorded during the same six-month period in 2023.

"That's a big number for the first six months of the year," said Laura Johnson, who manages the Idaho State Department of Agriculture's

marketing division, which provided the ag export value numbers.

Idaho has set records for total ag export value for the past three years.

According to Doug Robison, the Idaho president for AgWest Farm Credit, Idaho experienced an impressive run of export strength with Canada and Mexico during the first half of 2024. They the state's two largest ag export partners.

The Census Bureau data shows that \$234 million worth of farm products from Idaho were exported to Canada during the first half of

2024, making that nation the top ag export market for Idaho.

That \$234 million number was a 21 percent increase compared to the same period last year. A total of \$71 million worth of live animals (cattle) was exported to Canada during the first half of 24, which represents a 78 percent increase over the same period in 2023.

Mexico ranked as the No. 2 destination for Idaho ag exports, as \$130 million worth of Idaho ag products were sold to Mexico from January through June.

“We are shipping huge amounts of (potato products) to Mexico,” Johnson said.

The Census Bureau data shows \$73 million worth of “prepared vegetables” and \$14 million worth of “edible vegetables” were exported from Idaho to Canada during the first half of 2024. The prepared vegetables category includes mostly frozen potato products such as French fries, and the edible vegetables category includes mostly fresh potatoes.

Mexico in 2022 agreed to grant full market access for U.S. fresh potatoes beyond a 26-kilometer border zone that previously marked the limit of their export.

The Idaho and U.S. potato industries fought for more than two decades to try to realize the goal of selling fresh potatoes in all of Mexico.

The U.S. was always allowed to export frozen potato products, such as French fries, to all of Mexico, but fresh U.S. potatoes were previously only allowed within a 16-mile area along the U.S.-Mexico border.

“Mexico is becoming an important destination for Idaho potatoes, with first half potato exports to Mexico increasing more than 127%, nearly rivaling all of last year’s potato exports to the country,” Robison said.

The export market is very important to the state’s agricultural industry because so much of the food produced here ends up in other countries, Johnson said.

For example, one in every six rows of Idaho potatoes is exported, one in every six gallons of Idaho milk is processed into products that are exported, and half of the wheat grown in the state is exported, according to ISDA.

Dairy is still the state’s top ag export by value, but the total value of Idaho dairy



Corn is harvested in a Canyon County field in this Idaho Farm Bureau Federation file photo.

exports declined by 5 percent during the first half of the year, to \$134 million.

U.S. dairy export value declined by 5 percent in May compared to last year, according to the U.S. Dairy Export Council.

According to USDEC, “The decline comes on the heels of an increase in April and offers the latest evidence that U.S. (dairy) exports have struggled to gain real traction so far this year. Overall, May exemplified the up-and-down nature of 2024, with export sales mixed due to wide variation across products and regions.”

U.S. dairy export value declined by 6 percent through May, according to USDEC.

According to the Census Bureau data, \$109 million worth of products from Idaho in the prepared vegetable category and \$92 million worth of products in the edible vegetable category were exported during the first half. That represented increases of 55 percent and 26 percent, respectively.

Live animal exports (cattle) from Idaho are soaring, with \$76 million worth of export value in this category recorded during the first half. That’s a 90 percent increase

year over year. The vast majority of live animal exports from Idaho went to Canada.

A record \$1.18 billion worth of Idaho agricultural products were exported to other countries in 2023, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. That represented three straight years of record export value from Idaho.

A separate set of data released annually by USDA in the fall shows Idaho set ag export value records in 2020, 2021 and 2022. The USDA data for 2023 will be released in early November.

The Census Bureau data is based on what state a commodity is exported from, so it doesn’t capture all of Idaho’s farm product exports. For example, it wouldn’t capture the wheat from Idaho that is exported out of Portland.

The USDA data, which shows Idaho sold \$2.89 billion worth of ag products in 2022, captures more of the state’s farm exports but is not as timely as the Census Bureau data, which is released monthly.

However, both sets of data track closely when it comes to percentage increases and decreases. ■



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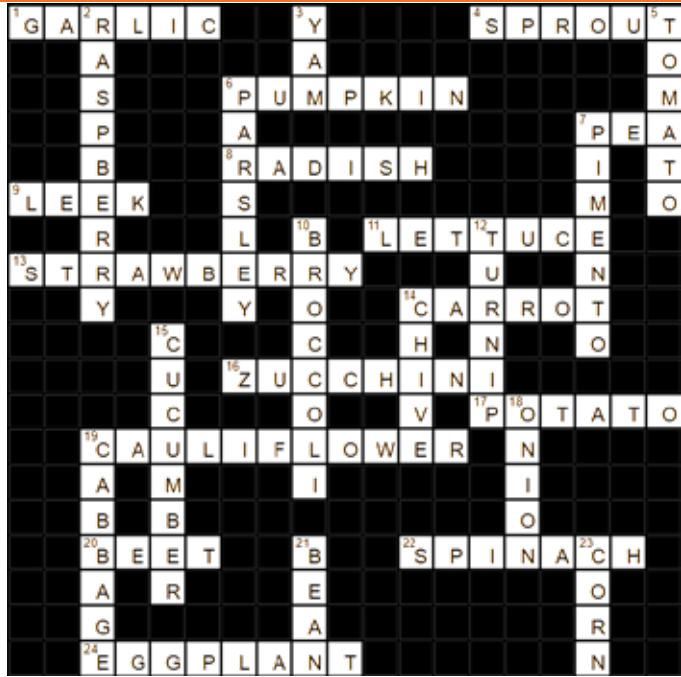
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Notice of the Annual Meeting of IFB Mutual Insurance Holding Company

The 2025 annual meeting for members of the IFB Mutual Insurance Holding Company will be held on Friday, February 7, 2025, at 10AM at the company's home office, 275 Tierra Vista Drive in Pocatello, ID. You are invited to attend.

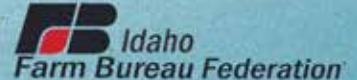
Jared Steadman- Secretary

Notice of Stockholders Meetings

The following annual stockholders meetings will take place, Friday, February 7, 2025, at the company's home office, 275 Tierra Vista Drive in Pocatello, ID. The board of directors for each company will be elected at these meetings.

10:30AM- Farm Bureau Marketing Association of Idaho
10:45 AM- FB Development Corporation of Idaho

Zak Miller- Executive Vice President, CEO



Statement of Ownership

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U of I, OSU partner on training volunteers to document Idaho's bees

By John O'Connell
University of Idaho

MOSCOW, Idaho – University of Idaho Extension is working to build a program that will train volunteers to collect and identify bees, with the goal of establishing an atlas cataloging the rich diversity of bee species throughout the state.

Oregon State University Extension created the Master Melittologist Program in 2018, training citizen scientists to collect and curate specimens toward a broader goal of documenting the bees of the Pacific Northwest (PNW).

UI Extension Educator Brad Stokes, of Canyon County, who specializes in horticulture and entomology, is collaborating with Andony Melathopoulos, an associate professor and pollinator health specialist with OSU Extension, to expand the program into the Gem State.

Stokes is pursuing funds to launch and sustain the program and has already begun building his base of volunteers.

Mellitology is the branch of entomology pertaining to the study of bees. Ten volunteers and four instructors – Stokes; Melathopoulos; Armando Falcon-Brindis, an entomology specialist at the U of I Parma Research and

Extension Center; and Ron Bitner,



Photo courtesy of Brad Stokes

Volunteers for the new Idaho Master Melittologist Program participate in a Sept. 12 training at Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge in Nampa.

an Idaho vintner and bee biologist who manages his vineyards for the benefit of pollinators – participated in an introductory training session hosted Sept. 12 at Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge in Nampa.

Largely overlooked in the past, native bees are gaining recognition for their role in maintaining healthy ecosystems and pollinating agricultural crops. Pomology experts, for example, believe the native blue orchard bee will be more crucial for pollinating orchards in the future than domesticated honeybees.

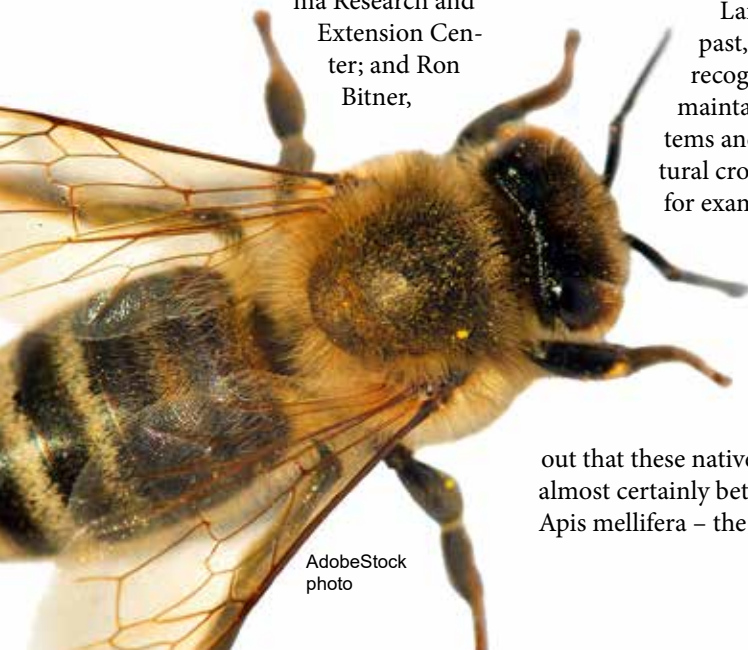
“We’re figuring out that these native bee species are almost certainly better pollinators than *Apis mellifera* – the European honeybee,”

Stokes said. “Idaho has such a diversity of crops, especially here in the Caldwell area where we have 140 different crops and a lot of seed crops, and we have a diversity of native bees that have been undocumented to date. We don’t even know what we have, and that’s a really important scientific question because you can’t protect something if you don’t know what species you have.”

The Master Melittologist Program trains volunteers to become naturalists who explore the landscape and collect bees, photographing any plants they discover supporting bees and placing bees associated with a common plant into the same jar.

Volunteers who reach the program’s apprentice level are able to collect bees, prepare museum-quality specimen mounts and capture data in a scientifically robust manner.

Volunteers who pass rigorous testing to



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“The Great Basin has the highest bee diversity in the world, and Idaho sits at the crossroads of three major bee faunas. All of the cool bees are in Idaho.”

—Andony Melathopoulos, associate professor and pollinator health specialist, OSU Extension

reach the journey level are qualified to identify bees to the genus level. Their work is verified by a taxonomist. In both Idaho and Oregon, the program's registration fee is \$300.

OSU's program has already produced more than 200,000 samples of native bees tied to associated plants, which is one of the world's largest datasets of its kind. The program has identified 600 individual bee species, including dozens that were previously undocumented in Oregon.

Melathopoulos anticipates some of them will eventually prove to be previously unknown bee species and will be assigned names. OSU has also developed a tool that draws from the database of bee species, their associated plants and the locations where they were found to provide site-specific guidance for landscape revegetation efforts.

The Washington State Department of Agriculture launched its own bee survey in 2023, also using Master Melittologist volunteers. The Washington Bee Atlas has since grown rapidly.

In 2020, Bitner and the College of Idaho received an \$87,000 Specialty Crop Block Grant, provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and awarded through the Idaho State Department of Agriculture, to evaluate native bees in Treasure Valley specialty crop farm fields, employing a former Idaho middle-school teacher, Amy Dolan, to assist in the project.

OSU later hired Dolan to train a small group of Idaho volunteers to begin work on cataloging specimens for an Idaho Bee Atlas. Dolan has since left the state, and partnering with UI Extension will bolster Idaho's contributions toward cataloging the bees of the PNW.

“We're just in the perfect geographical location to find all of these species, and probably some that are yet to be documented,” Stokes said. “They might be closely associated with very rare flowers or plants, so their impact on the ecosystem might be extraordinarily important.”

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has provided funding for the identification of bee species collected



Photo courtesy of Brad Stokes

Karen Blyth, of Canyon County, pursues bees during a Sept. 12 training at Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge in Nampa to launch University of Idaho Extension's new Master Melittologist Program in partnership with Oregon State University Extension.

within national wildlife refuges in Idaho. Any bee specimens representing new species in Idaho counties or statewide will be added to the collection at the Orma J. Smith Museum of Natural History and the USDA Pollinating Insect Lab in Logan, Utah.

“The Great Basin has the highest bee diversity in the world, and Idaho sits at the crossroads of three major bee faunas,” Melathopoulos said. “All of the cool bees are in Idaho.” ■

For more information about the Idaho Master Melittologist Program, contact Stokes at bstokes@uidaho.edu or (208) 459-6003. Visit <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/master-melittologist> to enroll directly.



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I pay top dollar for any type antique advertising signs or promotional items. Will also buy complete estates or complete collections. Let me know what you have. I also do Classic Car appraisals and Antique appraisals. Call or Text Tom 208-867-9357 I'm in Southern Idaho

Wanted: WWI, WWII, and Vietnam war souvenirs (medals, daggers, flags, uniforms, etc.) Located in SE Idaho. Call or text 208-201-3351

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E&E Electric- Local Electrical Business in Post Falls Idaho. We do Residential Commercial and Service work. Please call Eduard for free Estimates. 208-809-6612

Attn: Farmers. Have a rock chuck problem? Retired and responsible, I put safety first. With 1,400 chucks shot in 2024 I'm deadly accurate. References available. Call or text Rick Weidner, 986-888-7051. Donations are welcome.

FREE CLASSIFIEDS

Non-commercial classified ads are free to Idaho Farm Bureau members. Must include membership number for free ad. Forty (40) words maximum. Non-member cost is 50 cents per word. You may advertise your own crops, livestock, used machinery, household items, vehicles, etc. Ads will not be accepted by phone, Ads run one time only and must be re-submitted in each subsequent issue. We reserve the right to refuse to run any ad. Please type or print clearly. Proof-read your ad. Ads must be received by November 18 for the December Producer.

Mail ad copy to:

FARM BUREAU PRODUCER
P.O. Box 4848, Pocatello, ID 83205-4848
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LOOKING FOR A NEW PODCAST? DIRT ROAD DISCUSSIONS

Episode 67: Raising Beefalo

What do you get when you mix a buffalo and a cow? It sounds like the beginning of a laffy taffy joke, but for Megan and Trevor Stark, this is their reality. If it sounds hard, it absolutely is! Something of this nature requires a meticulous process to do it right. They talk about how narrow the margin of error is raising these "non-traditional" animals and how it has taken years to find resources to help them raise their herd successfully. As a bonus, they have a suggestion for the best cow dog ever.

